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ABSTRACT

In response to the need of Adult Basic Education (ABE) practitioners for means of disseminating information concerning new ideas and practices in their field (particularly the results of "309 Projects" funded under Title III of the Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1966), The Iowa Model was developed in which the disseminator is the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) working through the "309 Project Directors." The model satisfies the demand for accountability by building in a rationale that emphasizes planning on the basis of local needs, constructing rationales for individual proposals, field testing of innovations, and dissemination of the outcomes. Also involved in each of the three phases of the model (Planning, Testing, and Dissemination) are various information systems, particularly the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) through its Clearinghouses on Career Education and Adult Education. In Phase I a search of the literature is conducted, rationale developed, a proposal written and submitted to the DPI for funding. Phase II involves the carrying out of activities described in the proposal, culminating in the design of new practices and materials based on results of field tests. An important element is the establishment of a communications network among project directors. Phase III is a 2-pronged approach to dissemination (1) utilizing the informal network of project directors and (2) utilizing the user networks of the Clearinghouses. Focus is on three dissemination approaches: impersonal communication and personal communication from the DPI, through the project directors, to the practitioners, and such communication between these groups and the Clearinghouses. Possible dissemination media include radio, television, local access cable television, newspapers, newsletters, professional journals, brochures, personal sources, telephone, consultants, Telenet, workshops, conferences, and college courses. (JT)

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Dissemination Models: Dynamic Ways to Get the Message Out

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It is interesting to note that one of the definitions of the dissemination process is to scatter widely, as in the sowing of seed. I like this metaphor because it promises a future harvest. It is in that sense that we, as adult educators, should welcome the idea. And the metaphor further suggests that each of us has a role and a responsibility in the sowing of the seed, that is, the mutual sharing of ideas that helps us find out about each other's ideas and practices.

Now, as ABE practitioners, you are aware that a real problem exists with respect to dissemination. How can information about new ideas and practices become known across this state and the country? It is true that some dissemination models have been developed, notably in rural sociology, the health sciences, and educational administration. But, in the area of adult basic education, despite the enormous amount of funding for substantial research, little attention has been given to the function of dissemination and the design of models. As Darkenwald, Beder, and Adelman found in a 1974 study:

> Many 309(b) outcomes are never used by ABE Programs. A major reason is that 309(b) projects are temporary and all dissemination activity ceases when projects terminate.... Another reason for under-utilization of 309(b) outcomes is that few projects are willing or able to disseminate effectively. Dissemination requires specialized skills and resources beyond the capability of most projects.[1]

The policy decision in 1974 to transfer 309 funding from the USOE directly to the States provides adult educators at State and local levels with unusual opportunities. They now have the capability to design experimental and demonstration projects that acknowledge the diversity of the unique groups of adults who become participants in ABE programs. Adult educators can also enjoy the opportunity to disseminate their findings to other ABE personnel. The purpose would be to ensure the sharing and utilization of ideas and practices for the benefit of all. But these opportunities are not free of potential pitfalls. For example, in the absence of a carefully designed dissemination model, funds might inadvertently be allocated to duplicate research that has already been done, or

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to allow two groups to simultaneously research the same topic. Instead, the funds should go to support new research. With the intention of creating a dissemination model, to serve the needs of ABE personnel, I worked with a graduate assistant, Gary Conti. We were responding to a request from the State of Iowa, and so we called our creation the Iowa Model.[2] Because this model offers a systematic plan whereby to make certain that new research is fostered at the local level and that the results are widely disseminated, the model has implications for other states, including Virginia, and could be easily adapted. I will discuss the Iowa Model shortly.

The need for innovation in ABE was reported by Mezirow, Darkenwald, and Knox in their recent monumental study Last Gamble on Education,[3] and Kreitlow has confirmed that

> there is a greater concern for developing effective programs for the disadvantaged. This was a major trend in the mid 60's. It may have gone full cycle but it probably will never return to the low level of neglect that existed prior to the Kennedy administration.[4]

Regarding dissemination, Beder and Darkenwald report that it does not just happen, but must be thoroughly planned.

> ... dissemination is necessary for utilization, but not sufficient. For adoption to occur, a product must take the user's organizational constraints into account.... Dissemination is like shooting an arrow. Unless the arrow is aimed at a target and strikes it, there is no score.[5]

The target may be missed because individual practitioners in the field often lack adequate information or resources, and there is no systematic means by which to obtain them. Who, then, bears the responsibility? Clark argues that researchers must be the ones to develop, validate, and package information about innovations. He even urges a further commitment on the part of researchers to demonstrate to practitioners how such innovations could be incorporated into on-going programs.[6] In the Iowa Model, the disseminator is the Department of Public Instruction, working through the 309 Project Directors.

The Iowa Model satisfies the demand for accountability by building in a rationale that emphasizes planning on the basis of local needs, constructing

rationales for individual proposals, field testing of innovations, and dissemination of the outcomes. I will now discuss these activities in detail under the headings Phase I - Planning, Phase II - Testing, and Phase III - Dissemination.

Phase I: Planning

As the model Phase I indicates (Figure 1), research on a project to develop a new idea or a practice involves two-way communication between the Project Directors and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Each can present an argument to the other concerning the value of an idea. When an idea seems feasible, that is, when it meets a perceived local need, the DPI will issue a statewide request for a proposal (RFP). This proposal must be built on a rationale, or a set of reasons or principles, having its base in previous research and/or practice, as revealed through a review of the literature. This review would uncover existing information (in journal articles and other sources) which could influence the project's structure and direction. It would also prevent duplication of previous projects and indicate a void in a particular area of interest to practitioners.

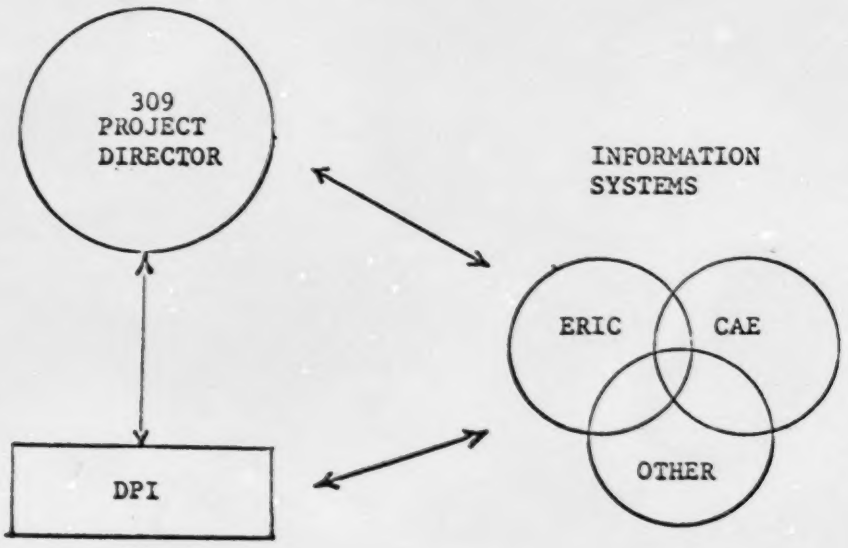


Figure 1

Phase I: Planning

I would like to point out that the ERIC Clearinghouse in Career Education (ERIC/CICE) and the Clearinghouse in Adult Education (CAE) are shown as the principal sources of information. The model illustrates the interlocking communication links between those sources and the Project Directors and the DPI. It implies that individual Directors might conduct their own searches or they might seek the help of the DPI. The latter course of action has certain advantages. The DPI's organization, connections, technology, and experienced staff equip it to expedite a search of the literature and transmit the data quickly to the Project Directors.

The information system known as ERIC contains approximately 250,000 documents and journal articles. To "talk" to and receive effective help from that system, the Project Directors and the DPI need some understanding of its language and unique features, because "the system rewards most richly the user who approaches it intelligently."[7] The task is not difficult, especially when we in ERIC are more than willing to lend assistance on an individual basis or through workshops.

Once the search of the literature has been conducted and a rationale developed, the proposal would be written and submitted to the DPI for funding. With this action, Phase I is complete.

Phase II: Testing

In Phase II (Figure 2), we will presume that several proposals have been approved and funded by the DPI. The next step is to test them for their efficacy in a college or other agency setting. In Phase II, the Project Directors carry out the activities described in the proposal. This might involve working closely with the administration and faculty of their own institutions and/or other institutions and agencies, in such matters as the training of staff.

An important aspect of Phase II, as the model illustrates, is the establishment of a communication network among the Project Directors involved in 309 projects that have received approval from the DPI, the funding agency. This network is designed

to promote interaction in the form of sharing ideas and resources, discussing problems, and comparing outcomes. The Project Directors also maintain close relationships with the DPI, submitting required progress reports. The DPI coordinates the Project Director's efforts through personal visits, Telenet, telephone, and correspondence. The DPI also ensures the flow of ideas and materials to the Project Directors from other sources, e.g. other States. During Phase II, both the DPI and the Project Directors continue to call upon the services of the Clearinghouses and other information resources to help with the testing and evaluation of ideas and materials. The Project Directors and the DPI also continue to share progress reports with the Clearinghouses.

Phase II culminates in the design of new practices and materials, based on the results of the field tests. The next step will be to disseminate the innovations to the practitioners.

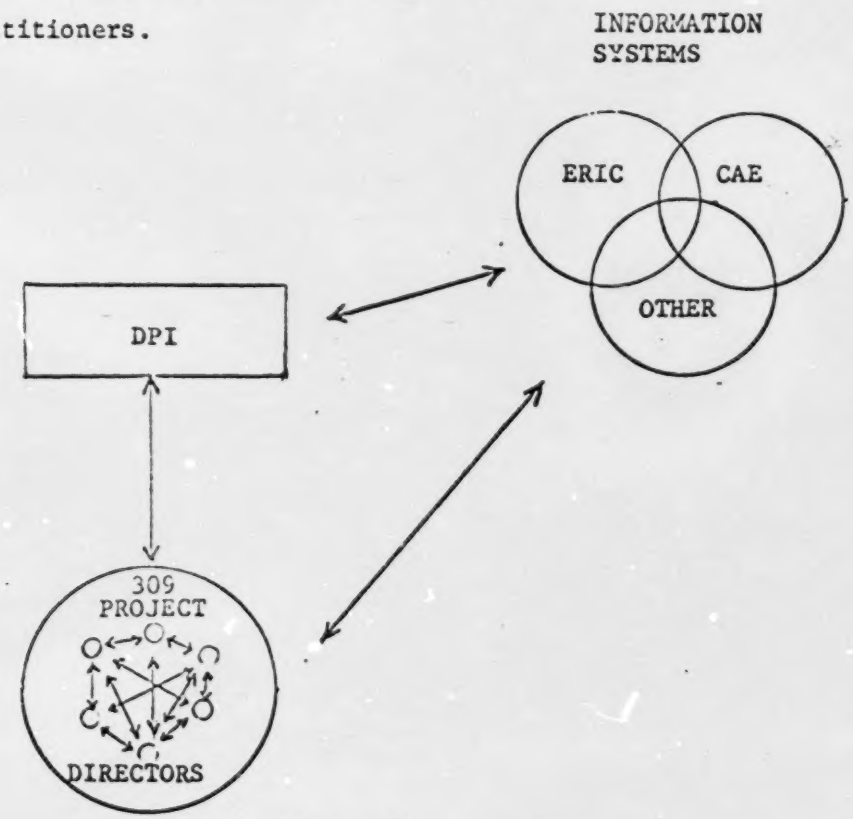


Figure 2

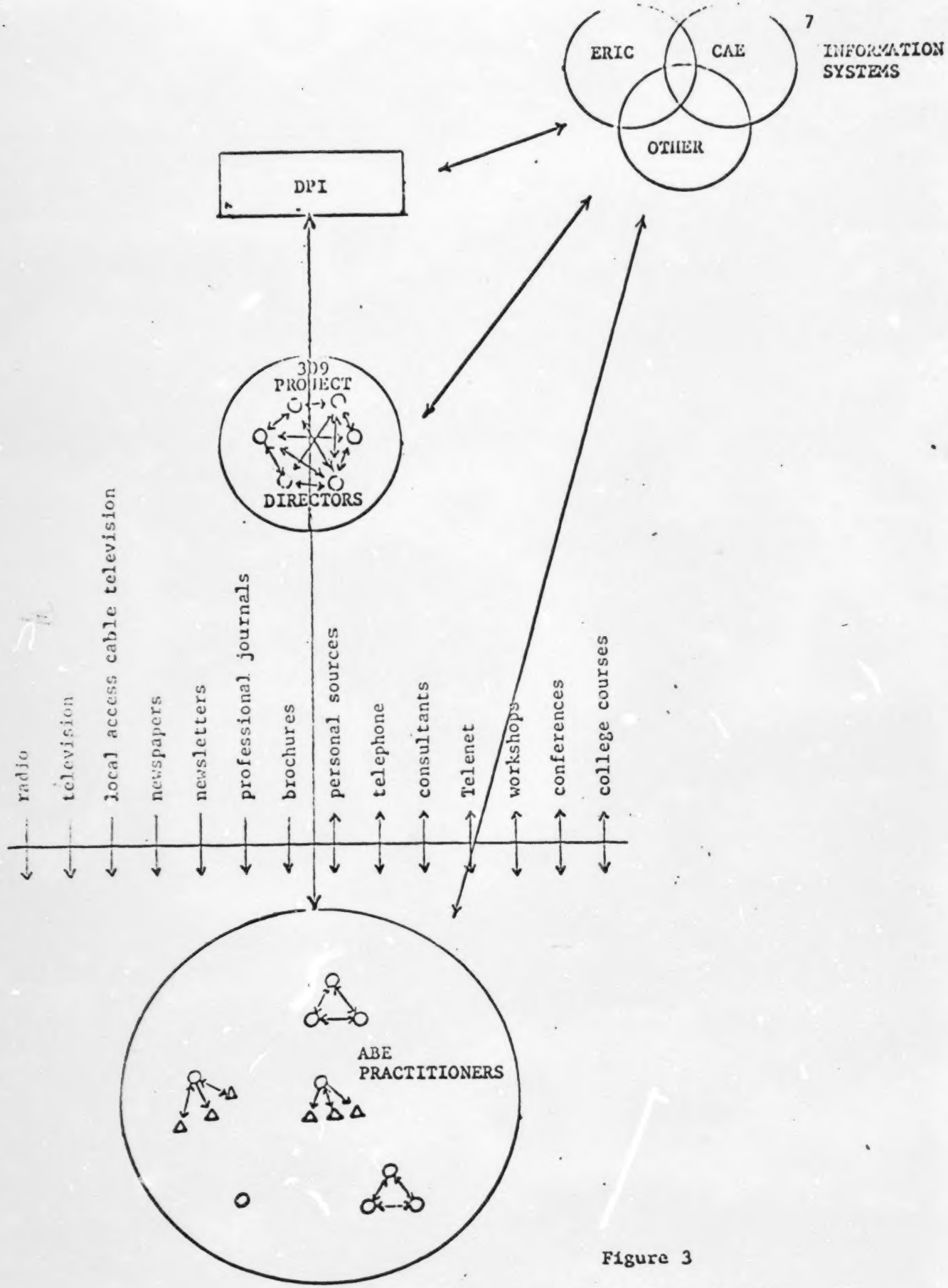
Phase II: Testing

Phase III: Dissemination

We need to remember that the dissemination (sometimes called "diffusion") and adoption of a new idea or practice is a complicated process. However, the pathway to adoption does follow a definite and predictable pattern. The early period, during which the innovation is tried by a small group, is followed by a period of rapid acceptance of the innovation by the majority. Finally, there is a period when the remainder of the practitioners accept the innovation.[8,9] Rogers and Shoemaker believe that the dissemination process embraces four essential elements: (1) innovation, (2) the communication channels, (3) the time involved, and (4) the social system.[10] When related to individuals, these elements have led to a generally accepted theory that individuals pass through a series of identifiable stages when faced with the adoption of a new idea or practice: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption.[11,12]

Phase III (Figure 3) involves a two-pronged approach to dissemination; first, by utilizing the informal network of Project Directors established in Phase II, and, second, by utilizing the user networks which form an essential part of the Clearinghouses' dissemination process. Because many of the practitioners are just becoming acquainted with the Clearinghouses, the bulk of the responsibility for dissemination must lie with the DPI. To accomplish this task, it is imperative for the DPI to establish close relationships with the practitioners in the field. This provision overcomes a major weakness of federally-sponsored 309 research mentioned by Beder and Darkenwald, i.e., the lack of a dissemination component for each project.

In the development of relationships between Project Directors and practitioners, we must realize that certain psychological barriers will present themselves. An important one is resistance to change, which can arise from apathy, lack of experience, fear of change, fear of being a loner in the vanguard, or any combination of these factors. These barriers can seriously interfere with the dissemination process.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radio
television
local access cable television
newspapers
newsletters
professional journals
brochures
personal sources
telephone
consultants
Telenet
workshops
conferences
college courses
ABE PRACTITIONERS

Figure 3

How can they be overcome? Our approach should be to devise a variety of dynamic ways to get the message out. Basically, of course, these involve forms or channels of communication. Rogers categorizes those channels as impersonal sources of information and personal communication.[13] Impersonal sources include media such as radio, television, local access cable television, newpapers, newsletters, professional journals, and brochures. Personal communication calls for social interaction in the form of personal contact, telephone contact, consultants, Telenet, workshops, conferences, and college or university courses.

Both impersonal (one-way communication) and personal (two-way communication) strategies are essential to the effective dissemination of a new idea or practice. Such strategies must be skilfully employed. In one-way communication, this involves an understanding of both the "hardware," or the actual equipment to be used, and the "software," which involves the ability to plan what information is to be presented, when, and by what means. The latter calls for a systematic approach, as Beder and Darkenwald emphasize. To them, dissemination is a communication process which must focus on describing the new idea or process which has been produced. The description is accompanied by evaluative data explaining the effectiveness of the innovation, according to the field tests conducted in Phase II of our process. Finally, they stress the need for use-replication data that describes how a practitioner could implement the new idea or practice.[14]

With regard to the communication strategies that have been discussed, it is important to remember that each of us will differ in our preferences when seeking information; some of us will favor personal contacts, while others will favor the one-way communication provided by professional journals. It must be reiterated that great variations exist among us, particularly in our attitudes toward new ideas or practices. Some of us will be adventurous, others cautious and even reluctant about accepting them. Agencies like the DPI should, then, study their audiences carefully to determine not only <u>what</u> information to give them and <u>when</u>

to give it, but how. In this regard, Darkenwald, Beder, and Adelman offer this useful advice:

> Another way to assess the potential effectiveness of dissemination strategies is to determine what sources local directors typically rely on for information and assistance. The assumption is that local directors seek information for help in solving problems. If a 309(b) project can tap the sources that local directors typically rely on, the chances that local directors will receive and heed the message are considerably enhanced.[15]

The Iowa Model focuses on three approaches--impersonal communication and personal communication from the DPI, through the Project Directors, to the practitioners; and such communication between those groups and the Clearinghouses. For each approach, it is possible to create strategies that can be tested for the dissemination of new ideas and practices. The selection of media poses a challenge, but the task will be easier if we pay attention to the inherent strengths and weaknesses of each, instead of deciding that a particular one, such as television, is "best." For example, newspapers and newsletters are static, or "frozen," in contrast to the sound that characterizes radio, and the motion added by the television tube; yet newspapers and newsletters have value in that they permit the learner to "stop" the message and ponder it. They might, in fact, be the most appropriate media for conveying certain information, and they might also be preferred by some practitioners.

I realize that the irregular schedules of many of our part-time colleagues may preclude the use of radio and television, but special information programs scheduled on a regular basis should not be ruled out. Here, the experience of the Cooperative Extension Service invites review. Another possibility would be for us to organize ourselves into "listening" or "viewing" groups who could use the program content, along with discussion material and questions, in staff development. That approach would require the training of some of us as discussion leaders. If the discussion groups were encouraged to share their experiences and needs with the program directors, the results could be mutually rewarding--the

possibility that practitioners would adopt an idea or a practice and the discovery of practitioners' grass-root needs, to which the DPI could respond through funded research and/or retrieval of information from the Clearinghouses. This same process might be accomplished at lower cost by using the local access cable television station or by "piggy-backing" a video tape to the various colleges, along with the appropriate discussion material. Incidentally, the old Canadian Farm Forum model holds potential for adult educators and would repay careful study.[16]

The value of the print media as conveyors of information about new ideas and practices has been discussed. Those media would also be useful for locating ABE practitioners who function as "opinion leaders" in their own settings. Once located, they could be encouraged to compose material on the potential value of an innovation. Of course, the material would carry their names and even their photos. A selective mailing list would seem wise, in view of the costs of printing and postage. Soliciting ABE practitioners to submit articles to professional journals should also be explored.

The value of personal communication can hardly be over-stated. DuGas found it to be the most important channel for the dissemination of new ideas and practices among practitioners.[17] Likewise, Darkenwald, Beder, and Adelman are convinced that "person-to-person disseminations are generally necessary if 309(b) results are to be utilized by teachers, administrators, and others in local programs."[18] In Figure 3 of the Iowa Model, such person-to-person networks emerge informally among the ABE practitioners, to create a two-step flow of communication from the DPI to "opinion leaders," who, in turn, disseminate the new idea or practice to their peers. Anderson also stresses the importance of personal contact in his study involving adult education directors, especially in the initial stage of adoption of an idea or practice. Considerable personal contact took place between those directors at conferences, workshops, and meetings, as well as by telephone. In addition, they sought information in the form of printed material, such as

brochures, from their fellow directors.[19] In effect, such communication spreads not only information, but influence. Again, if an opinion leader discusses a new idea or practice with two other practitioners, and if they pass the information on to their peers, interest in the innovation is generated throughout the population of ABE practitioners.

For the Iowa Model to be effectively used, it is important for agencie like the DPI to discover what kinds of personal communication are favored by ABE practitioners for obtaining information. A survey would help to determine the relative effectiveness of telephone contact, workshops, conferences, and college courses, as well as reveal certain dispositions that affect personal communication. For example, opinion leaders may not seek help from professional experts, but may rely, instead, on persons within their own geographic regions.

Likewise, in planning workshops and conferences, it is wise to research the means by which ABE practitioners are selected for attendance. Are they appointed by a Director? Are they self-appointed? Is selection limited to full-time ABE practitioners? The implication of such research are plain, especially if there are plans to involve the person who has attended in a locally designed staff development program. Other important questions are these: How does one locate opinion leaders? Do opportunities exist at institutions for local exchange of information and the emergence of informal leaders? In the design of workshops and conferences, is provision made for two-way communication through informal "swap shops"? One idea worth exploring is to use a Polaroid camera to photograph each participant and attach the photo to a biographical card, listing areas of experience and interest and giving the room number and home address of each participant. The cards would be displayed in a prominent location. Such attempts to encourage informal professional networks could be measured by gathering data through follow-up questionnaires, at the same time that the total conference or workshop is being evaluated.

My final approach concerns your use of the Clearninghouses. The strategies relate at this time to the ERIC Clearinghouse in Career Education (ERIC/CICE), with its data base of 250,000 items, as the Clearinghouse in Adult Education has not yet been established. These strategies include the design of special workshops keyed to the needs of practitioners and providing them with the skills required to utilize ERIC. Another suggestion is the development by the ERIC/CICE staff of informal bibliographies and monographs to assist the practitioners.

The Iowa Model: Merging of Phases

Figure 4 shows the marriage of Phases I, II, and III, which produces a total model for the planning, testing, and dissemination of 309 project information. In conclusion, I hope that the model is clear to you and that it fulfills the purposes stated in the title of this presentation to provide you with dynamic ways for getting the message out. The dynamism lies, of course, in the interlocking communication networks which utilize a variety of strategies and media. Such networks, disseminating a constant flow of ideas and practices, would make us better informed and offer us a wider choice of options in dealing with staff and students. The ultimate beneficiary is, of course, the vast number of under-educated adults who are currently participating in or longing for programs that would help them cope with life.

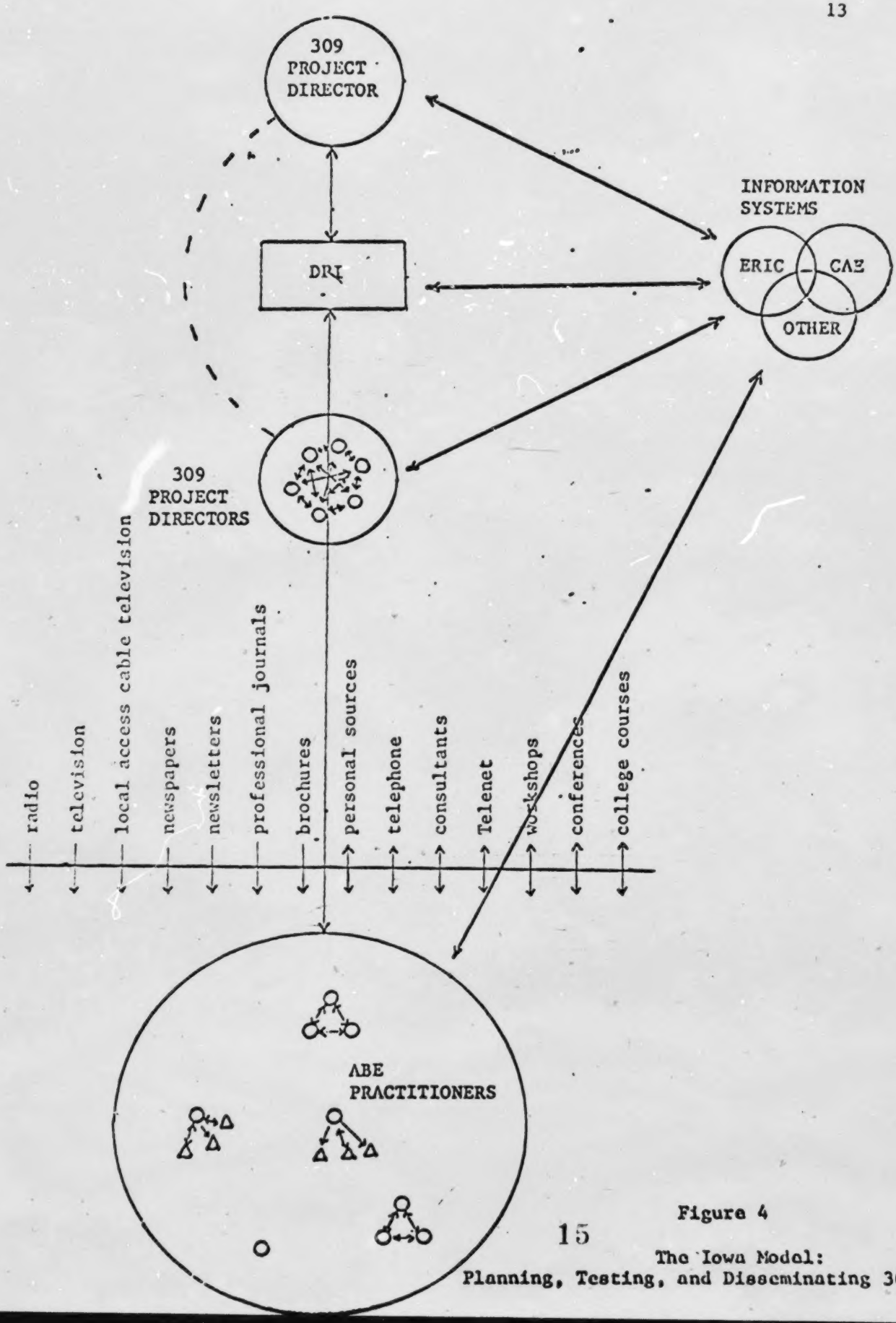

Figure 4

The Iowa Model:
Planning, Testing, and Disseminating 309 Projec

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